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THE  
HOLY \* ROMAN  
CURIOSITY \* SHOP.

- A LECTURE ON RELICS -

- BY -

◁ B. M. ▷

PUBLISHED BY

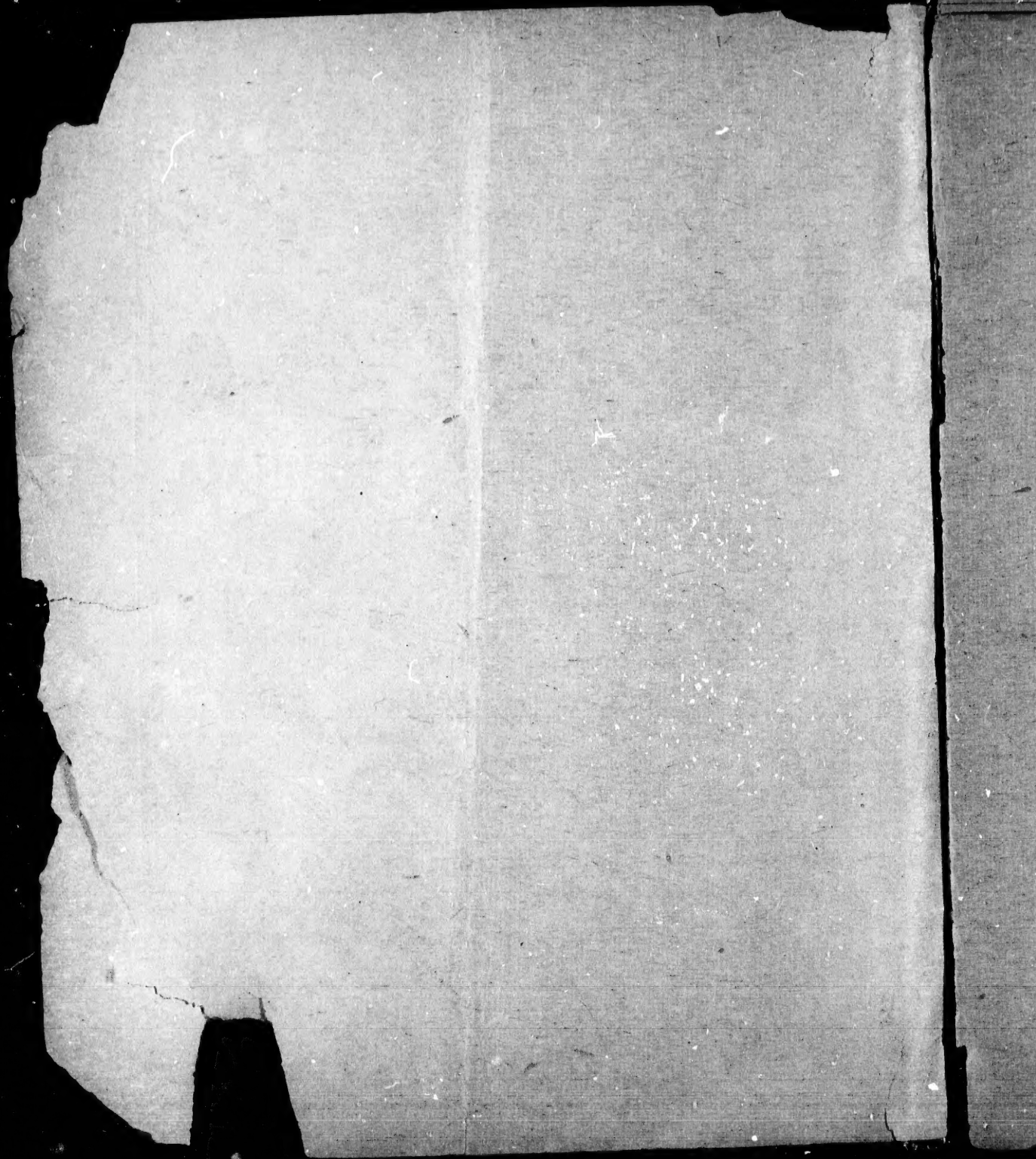
NORMAN MURRAY,  
MONTREAL.

1892.

DEDICATED, WITHOUT PERMISSION, TO SIR JOHN THOMPSON, PRESIDENT OF  
THE CATHOLIC TRUTH ( & ? ) SOCIETY, OTTAWA.

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## The Holy Roman Curiosity Shop.

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THE desire to make money, which prevails to such a large extent, and which is by no means always to be commended, seems to be especially strong in a place where it should be least expected. An institution which professes to make it its business to prepare men for a life in another world without his material body and its material needs, the Church, the founder of which has even extolled poverty, has always been and is to-day as eager to make money as a gambler, and as eager to hoard it up as a miser.

Whoever has had dealings with the Nuns well know how close-fisted they are, and how, on the one hand, they will bargain for a cent when buying, and how, on the other hand, they will exact the utmost when selling or making a lease. A very interesting letter, in a late number of the *Canada Revue*, describes how these ladies understand to make money.

We also know that, on account of the widening of Bleury Street, in this city, a strip of property belonging to the Jesuits had to be expropriated. The good Fathers asked a sum three times larger than that awarded by the City Assessors, and the matter had to be brought into the Court of Review. There, in order to prove the value of the property, they showed, amongst other things, that the educational department of their institution netted a profit of \$ 60,000 per annum, upon which enormous sum they pay no taxes. Upon this subject, a very interesting article may be read in the *Canada Revue*, of 10th December, 1892, the journal which is now under the ban of the Church.

Money is power. Nobody knows this better, and nobody has ever tried harder to gain both money and power, than the Roman Catholic Church.

The best paying business carried on by the Church was



and is to some extent even now the sale of Relics and Indulgences, and to keep up this trade the people were engulfed into the most abominable superstition, and then swindled in the most painful manner. To write a complete history of this traffic carried on by the Holy Roman Catholic Church would be a gigantic work, and far exceed the limits I must necessarily put to this paper. I can only give a hasty sketch, which, however, will be sufficient to show the enormous extent and the astonishing absurdities of this system of deception.

The priests thoroughly understood human weaknesses and tendencies, and to this they owed their success. They soon found that people are more or less fond of Relics, and the knowledge of this became to them a "gold-mine," which even to the present day has not been exhausted.

Everybody values a relic of some kind, be it a lock of hair of a beloved one, an embroidered letter-case, a dried flower, or a piece of ribbon; likewise it is of great interest to see things which have been used by celebrated persons.

The old Greeks and Romans had their relics, and some of them were almost Roman Catholic in their nature, as, for instance, "The Egg of Leda," and "The Holy Shield Fallen from Heaven." The Hindoos carried on great wars about an enormous tooth supposed to belong to Buddha, and the Mahommedans preserve flags, arms, clothing, the beard, and two teeth of their prophet; and so we find relics among every people.

In the history of the Christian Church, no trace of relics can be discovered until the time of Constantine. It is related of him that during a battle he saw in the heavens a shining cross, with the Greek inscription, "By this sign though shalt conquer." He immediately had a flag made adorned with a cross, and his soldiers, who were mostly Christians, followed it with enthusiasm.

After that event the cross became fashionable, and very soon Helena, the Emperor's mother, is said to have discovered the true cross upon which, more than three hundred years before, Christ was crucified; also the grave in which Christ's

body had reposed before its resurrection. The contemporary writers say nothing about this discovery; even Eusebius, who describes the journey of the Empress, says nothing about these wonderful discoveries. Nevertheless, the story has been accepted, and the Church celebrates a particular feast of "The Discovery of the Cross." Helena is said to have found also the crosses of the two thieves, but as she did not find the well-known sarcastic inscription which Pilate had ordered to be affixed to the true cross, it was difficult to distinguish Christ's cross from the others. Priests, however, have an inventive mind, and they managed this little difficulty very nicely. They placed a sick person upon one of the crosses and he became more sick; this no doubt must have been the cross of the godless thief. Then the sick man was placed upon one of the other crosses and his health improved; this was the cross of the penitent thief. When finally he was put upon the third cross, he immediately got up quite well; thus the cross of Christ was found. By-and-bye the graves of the Apostles were found also, and later on the bones of any number of saints and martyrs. Of course, these relics all possessed the power of working miracles.

When we consider how difficult it sometimes is, even in the present day, to discover if necessary the remains of some deceased person, when in all the civilized States (except Canada) the Government insists upon registration of all births, marriages and deaths, it is really marvellous to hear that in those days they found not only the bones but also the clothes of saints who had been executed as criminals, and had been buried anywhere like dogs; but what is more wonderful than all, is the fact that, of some saints, so many parts were found that, if put together, several complete skeletons could have been made. For instance, there are two complete skeletons of St. Dionysius—one in St. Denis, France, another in St. Emmerau, in Germany; whilst Prague and Bamberg each possess one of his heads, and Munich a spare hand, so that this saint had two complete bodies, five hands, and four heads.

The first saints were mostly unknown people, and of no consequence in their day, and it is strange that the adoration

of the Holy Virgin—who out of the millions of girls upon earth was chosen by God as a “vessel of grace”—should have commenced much later than that of the crazy and unclean hermits called saints. Even in the fourth century nobody thought of adoring the Virgin Mary—in fact, many things were said derogatory to her character. For instance, Chrysostomus considers her capable of suicide, and relates that the angel notified her of the conception of Jesus before she discovered her state, otherwise the discovery might have led her to end her life out of shame. The adoration of Mary commenced in the fifth century, but very soon she had outstripped not only all saints, but even Christ and God himself. The name “Mother of God,” now so common, created much bitterness in the fifth century. Nestorius thought “Mother of Christ” more sensible and decent, but the Ephesian Council decided for “Mother of God.” It was quite natural that afterwards people commenced to adore also the “Grandmother of God;” and if it had not been for Pope Clement XI., who interfered, the Catholics probably would to-day pray to aunts and uncles of God. Albertus Magnus, Bishop of Regensburg, who died at Cologne, 1280, studied the subject of the Virgin Mary most exhaustively, and has written many large folios about it. There are twenty-one of his books in existence. He is said to have written eight hundred. He tried to find out whether she was blonde or brunette, dark-eyed or blue-eyed, large or small. It is, however, doubtful whether he has settled the question. To judge by the existing relics her hair must have been variegated in color—brown, blonde, black and red. The hair with which, on St. Mary’s Day, she personally mended the shirt of the Archbishop St. Thomas was rather red. But all accounts agree that she must have been very handsome.

St. Damiani, who died in 1059, relates that God himself fell violently in love with her. He called together a special heavenly convention, in which he told the wandering angels about his love and the plan of salvation, and gave to the Archangel Gabriel a letter addressed to the Virgin, containing all particulars. Gabriel called on Mary, and as soon as he had spoken to her she felt that she would become the mother of the Saviour.



Angels took the whole house of Mary and carried it from Bethlehem to Italy. They left it near a place called Tersatto, but afterwards removed it to Loretto. The inscription over the house reads, "The House of the Birth-giver of God, wherein the Word became Flesh." Over this house, which, both as to form and material, does not differ at all from the other peasants' huts of Loretto, is built a magnificent church, and thousands of pilgrims flock there in order to dip their rosaries into the little gruel-pan belonging to Jesus, and (what is most important) to sacrifice a more or less considerable sum of money. Thus a large treasure has been collected by a gross, shameless and ridiculous deception.

However, the good Catholics were so well trained by their priests, that they mistrusted their own eyes rather than a priest. In 1500 a monk named Eiselin travelled through Wurtemberg, showing a feather out of Archangel Gabriel's wing. To kiss this feather was a preventative of the Black Pest—of course the kiss had to be paid for. One night this precious feather was stolen, but that did not trouble the good monk a bit. In the presence of his landlady he filled a little box with hay, and pretended that it came from the manger in which Jesus had lain, and the hay was kissed instead of the feather. Even the landlady kissed it, so that Eiselin said to her in surprise, "And you, too, my darling!"

The traffic in relics soon became enormous. Old rags and bones could be found anywhere, so that no capital was required for this business, and the profits were large.

When the Bishops of Rome became Popes, they stopped this traffic somewhat, but only for their own selfish purposes. The relics had to be examined in Rome, and in order to be considered genuine by the authorities, proof had to be brought forth in the shape of gold coin. This was a sort of McKinley bill for the purpose of fostering Roman home industry in relics.

Ludovicus, the Holy King of France, made two unsuccessful crusades, but he was consoled by the fact that he had succeeded in purchasing for a large sum a few splinters of the cross, a few nails, the sponge, the purple gown of Jesus, and

the crown of thorns. When these treasures arrived, he and his whole court went to meet them, barefooted, as far as Vincennes.

Henry the Lion—another King of France—brought a lot of relics to Brunswick, the most valuable of which was a thumb of St. Marcus, for which the city of Venice in vain offered 100,000 gold ducats. One almost ceases to sympathize with the people of that day. They were so stupid that the priests would have had to be angels not to take advantage of their stupidity.

The whole wardrobe of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, and other saints, turned up. The holy lance was found with which Longinus wounded Jesus in the side, and the handkerchief with which St. Veronica wiped the perspiration from Jesus' face on his way to Golgotha, and into which he pressed his likeness in memory of the event. Of this handkerchief existed so many pieces that it must have been fifty yards long—a good-sized handkerchief.

The wine jugs used at the wedding of Cana were found also, and they contained a little wine yet, which never decreased. At first there were only six, but they were soon augmented, and they were shown at Cologne and Magdeburg. Of splinters of the cross there were enough to build a large man-of-war; nails, hundreds of pounds; and thorns grew on every hedge,—some of these had the habit of bleeding on Good Friday. The cup was discovered, also, out of which Jesus drank at the Last Supper; also some of the bread which was left over on the same occasion. They found, also, the dice with which the soldiers played for the coat of Christ. This coat was seamless, and it was shown simultaneously in five different places. As late as 1845 the whole civilized world was disgusted to see an exhibition of the only genuine coat at Treves, in Germany. All these coats were guaranteed by a Papal Bull to be genuine; and as one only could possibly be so, we find here a *wilful* deception on the part of the *Pope*.

Shirts of Mary were found large enough to serve as an overcoat for a stout man; also a precious ring was shown at Perusa, which was Mary's wedding ring. Her pretty small



slippers, and also a pair of very large red ones, were exhibited. Milk of the Holy Virgin was found in considerable quantities; and blood of Jesus was found in small drops, and sometimes in large bottles. Baby napkins of Jesus, carpenter tools of Joseph, one of the thirty silver pieces, a thick rope with which the traitor Judas hanged himself, his empty purse and lantern, the roost upon which sat Peter's cock and a few feathers of the bird, the basin in which Pilate washed his hands, the bones of the donkey on which Jesus rode on Palm Sunday, also a few of the original palm leaves used on that day,—all these things were found and shown for money. Even Old Testament relics came to the surface, such as Moses' stick, manna, Noah's beard, the brazen serpent, a piece of the rock out of which Moses drew water, etc., etc. A relic of great repute was the coat of St. Martin (in Latin *capa* or *capella*), which was used as a war flag. The priests who carried it were called "Capellani," and the church in which it was deposited was called a "Capella;" hence the names chapel and chaplain. The belief in these things was so strong that the priests, encouraged, went still further in their imposition, and showed things which were quite impossible. It may appear to be a joke, but it is true, nevertheless, that the following things were shown: The dagger and shield which the Archangel Gabriel used when fighting the devil; a little of the breath of Christ in a small box; some Egyptian darkness in a bottle; some of the sound of the bells which were tolled when Christ entered Jerusalem; a glimpse of the light which shone from the star to the wise men of the East; a little bit of the Word which became flesh; a few groans emitted by Joseph when planing knotty wood; the thorn in the flesh which troubled St. Paul so much, etc.

The priests were not satisfied with the holy rags and bones, so they discovered oil paintings of Jesus and Mary, done by St. Luke. They were neither a credit to the artist nor to the beauty of the persons they represented, as they were horrible. Some pictures fell from heaven; and, finally, the priests did not hesitate to get them done openly by painters. These pictures were adored the same as the relics.

Many were the quarrels and wars over these pictures, and finally these wars resulted in the division of the church into the Greek and Roman.

The discovery of the Holy Sepulchre caused a heavy pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and to all places which had become noted through the Bible. Even the heap of dirt upon which Job was supposed to have sat was a centre of attraction. These pilgrimages came still more into vogue when indulgences were connected with them. Indulgence is the outcome of oral confession and belief in Purgatory. Originally those who were, on account of crime, expelled from the church, had to confess their sins openly if they wished to be reinstated. When the priests became mightier they changed this into secret confession, which increased their power over their unfortunate believers. Pope Innocent III. decreed, however, that every one must confess his sins to a priest at least once a year, and carry out the penance imposed upon him. Whoever omitted this was excommunicated. Everybody will readily understand how great was the power thus put into the hands of the priests; for, apart from the fact that they found out all kinds of secrets, which they were at liberty to use for their own ends, they had the power to give absolution or refuse it, as they saw fit, and they used this prerogative according to the amount of ransom paid by the poor sinner.

Purgatory was an invention of the Roman Bishop Gregory the Great. This was, according to his explanation, a place where souls were purified to fit them for heaven—a sort of “soul laundry.” Whoever thus found himself midway between heaven and hell could be certain of being detained a considerable time in this uncomfortable place, unless the priests (who must have been on a footing of intimacy with the laundry devils) caused his release, and had him forwarded to heaven on a through ticket, which, of course, had to be paid for. The regulations of purgatory must have been well known to the priests, for they knew exactly how many masses would be required to release a poor soul.

There were few who were not quite convinced of the

ability of the Pope to condone sins ; but Clement VI. settled that point in his Bull of 1342 as follows : "The whole human race could have been saved by one single drop of the blood of Jesus ; but so much of this blood has been shed that this copiousness, which could not have been in vain, constitutes an enormous and inexhaustible treasure belonging to the church, and to this treasure the Pope alone has the key, and can draw from it eternally for the purpose of condoning sins."

Whoever made a pilgrimage to this or that shrine of grace, and sacrificed the necessary amount of money, could gain absolution for past and even for future sins. In Silesia there was, in the last century, such a shrine, with a picture of "The Mother of God," and once this shrine was robbed of all its jewels and valuables. The priests soon found the thief, in the person of one of Frederick the Great's soldiers, and they complained to the king. The soldier admitted his possession of the missing articles, but said that the Virgin Mary had given them to him. The king then asked the priests whether this could be possible. They answered that of course it was possible, though very improbable. In consequence, the soldier was not punished ; but the great king issued an order to his soldiers, on pain of death, never to receive any more presents from the Virgin Mary.

Some relics were exhibited but once every seven years. This was done to attract people through the rarity of this privilege, and so that the interest should not flag. In 1496, 142,000 devoted people flocked to Aix la Chapelle, to see the gigantic coat of Mary, the baby napkin of Jesus made of yellowish felt, and the cloth upon which had lain the detached head of John the Baptist. The harvest was magnificent. In 1818 there was a revival, and these old rags were trotted out again, but this time only forty thousand pilgrims came. The Reformation, the Revolution and much-hated Rationalism, had rent a large hole in the old superstition. Yet in 1844, as I mentioned before, the seamless coat of Christ was shown at Treves, and about a million of believers came there to kiss that old garment. The same show was held in Treves again in 1891.



That the Popes shear their sheep pretty well is a well known fact, but it may interest you to know that the Holy Father is in reality a sheep-breeder, and the prices he gets for his wool would make an Australian stock-breeder green with envy. The Pope keeps a small number of lambs which have been sanctified over the graves of the Apostles, and out of this wool is made the Episcopal "Pallium." The "Pallium" originally was a Roman mantle made of purple stuff, gold embroidered and ornamented, and was given to Patriarchs and Bishops by the Emperors as a token of their esteem—much as nowadays kings and queens give Orders, Ribbons, Garters, etc. Gregory I. was the first Pope who took it upon himself to dispense this favour instead of the Emperor. Gradually, as was always the case with Popes in other things, they claimed it as their sole right, made a monopoly of it, and forced the Bishops to buy the "Pallium" in Rome. The Popes were the sole manufacturers. The article complete—blessing and all—cost 30,000 florins (\$10,000), terms cash, and this was such a nice source of income that John VIII. had the temerity to declare that any Bishop who did not order a "Pallium" in three months would be deposed. The Popes became so greedy that, after a while, the garment was considered too good value for the paltry sum paid for it, and they substituted for it ribbons adorned with a red cross hanging over the front and back, like braces. These ribbons were made by nuns, of the wool shorn from the sacred lambs, and weighed about six ounces. Accordingly, a pound of this wool brought about \$35,000. Bishops are usually old gentlemen, and succeeded each other rather quickly, and when they died their successors had to buy a new "Pallium." One Bishop of Mayence was obliged to sell the left leg of a golden image of Jesus to raise funds to pay for his "Pallium." Sometimes Bishops received two bills for a "Pallium" from two counter-Popes. How they got over that difficulty I do not know.

Pope Boniface VIII. had a truly golden idea. He instituted a Jubille year, like that of the old Romans and Jews. Whoever came to Rome during the Jubilee year, and deposited his mite upon the altar, received absolution for all sins ever

committed. Who would not be glad to get rid of his sins? A little short murder, for instance, is apt to ruin and embitter any honest man's whole life; and who would not be happy to receive the assurance that on the Day of Judgment this little unpleasantness would not be mentioned? Naturally, all the sinners who could afford it came to Rome. 200,000 came in the year 1300, and the Pope's harvest was immense—about fifteen millions of florins in one year—an enormous sum for those days. This business turned out so unexpectedly good that Pope Clement VI. had the unexampled goodness of heart to order a repetition of this feast every fifty years. Pope Urban VI. made it every thirty-three years (in memory of the number of years which Jesus lived); but Sextus IV. changed it to twenty-five years, because, as he said, human life is so very short. The second Jubilee, in 1350, was more profitable even than the first, and Clement VI. was kind enough to direct the Angels of Paradise to allow the souls of those who died on the journey, before reaching Rome, to be introduced into Paradise without any further examination. Many believers were crushed to death in the crowd; ten thousand got a chance at once to find out the utility of the absolution, for they died of the black pest; but that was hardly noticeable amongst over a million of people who came there during that Jubilee. Two priests stood at the altar, day and night, with collection plates, and were quite unable to cope with the work of receiving the money.

Now, Pope Boniface IX. calculated that many Christians could not come to Rome, on account of the expense, or perhaps because they could not leave their business, so he was kind enough to send them absolution, C. O. D., into their houses. They had to pay one-third of the travelling expenses to Rome, and received full absolution. In spite of this modern improvement, the people still came to Rome, and once the crowd was so great that the bridge over the Tiber collapsed and two hundred people lost their lives. The Popes became more and more greedy, and occasionally instituted an extra Jubilee, and travellers dealing in absolution were sent out everywhere. Some of them were as obstinate and as

intrusive as modern book or sewing machine agents; and occasionally it happened that the people kicked them out of their village.

As late as 1825 an attempt was made to celebrate a Jubilee, but the light of reason was already too strong for the perpetration of such mediæval nonsense, and the Jubilee was not a success.

The Popes were not satisfied with the magnificent incomes derived from these sources, and looked for other fields. Every Bishop had to pay his entire first year's emoluments to the Pope. Supposing this to have been on an average about \$5,000, and the number of Bishops at least two thousand, they got the handsome sum of ten millions of dollars. Then came the fees and dispensation moneys for permission of marriage between blood relations. These marriages were bound to occur very often, because the Popes had wisely prohibited them up to the 14th degree. At the same time they had made a regular tariff of prices for the privilege of marrying one's first, second or third cousins, etc.

The whole Christian world was divided into sections, and commercial travellers were sent out from the large concern at Rome, under the name of Papal Commissioners. They carried with them letters of absolution, of which the following was the text: "In the name of our most Holy Father the representative of Jesus Christ I release thee first from any Church penalty thou mayst have incurred; I forgive thee also all misdoings and crimes thou hast committed, however great and serious they may have been: I release thee from any penalty thou wouldst justly have had to suffer in Purgatory for the sake of these sins: I enable thee again to partake of the Holy Sacrament, and to commune with believers, and I reinstate thee into the innocent condition immediately after thy baptism, so that when thou shalt die the gates of Hell, which lead to torture and punishment, shall be closed, and thou shalt be led into the straight road to Paradise. Shouldst thou not die immediately, this promise of grace shall remain incontestable." This kind of insurance policy had to be well paid for, of course. In the Papal counting-house a tariff was made for the absolu-



tion of all the most hideous crimes. This tariff, incredible as it may seem, still exists, and quotes prices for the forgiveness of parenticide, fratricide, incest, child-murder, abortion, adultery, the most unnatural voluptuousness, perjury; in short, everything in the shape of sin and crime. The most revolting part of the document, however, is the end, which reads, "Poor people cannot receive absolution, for they have no money; therefore they must be deprived of this privilege." For a fee of twelve florins even the priests were permitted to commit adultery, incest and worse things. Bishops had even special privileges, which I dare not mention to polite ears.

Leo X. found it profitable to sublet "the Absolution" in some districts to large speculators for stipulated amounts. As a rule, these speculators were bishops, occasionally a prince. These general agents employed sub-agents, generally priests, who travelled all over the country preaching and forgiving sins, and they had particular instructions how to behave and how much to charge:—Great princes \$25 or more; abbots, bishops, dukes, nobility and their wives, \$10 or more per head; people with an income of \$500 pay \$6 or more; women and workingmen \$1; very poor people 50 cents. Women who had no right to take their husband's money were permitted to do so against the husband's will, and poor women were allowed to beg and otherwise acquire the money to pay for the valuable letter of absolution. Everybody knows that a business employing first-class salesmen generally thrives, and the general agents had a sharp look-out for the smartest fellows they could find. The smartest of all was the well-known John Tetzel, born in Pirna, Saxony. He was once condemned to be drowned for having committed adultery, but got off through influence in high quarters. This fat and cheeky fellow, of whom a good copper-plate can be seen in Germany, was the true ideal of a priest. He is said to have been so good-humoured and smart that even in our day he might have been successful in palming off his valuable documents. In Switzerland, Tetzel gave absolution to a rich peasant who had committed murder, and permitted him, for a further consideration, to commit one more murder, as the peasant had one mo-

enemy he desired to remove. In spite of all his smartness however, he was once badly duped.

A Mr. Von Schenck, a nobleman of Magdeburg, came to him, and offered him a handsome sum for the forgiveness of a great sin which he intended to commit. Of course, Tetzel assented, chuckled within himself, and pocketed the money. A few days later Tetzel travelled from Magdeburg to Brunswick with his iron box, containing several thousand florins. In a forest near Helmstadt Mr. Von Schenck surprised and relieved him of his entire money. Tetzel remonstrated wildly, but it was of no use. "Here, behold your letter of absolution," said Von Schenck; "either I am right, or you are a swindler." He kept the money and went away.

Some people bought absolution for several hundred years. The calculation was very curious. The years in Purgatory were counted, and, according to the priest, one had to roast twenty years for this, thirty years for that sin, so that an accomplished sinner could easily make up a couple of hundred years or so in Purgatory.

To show how much wealth the Church had accumulated, it is a matter of history that when, during the French revolution, the convents were to be abolished and Church property confiscated, the clergy offered the National Convention, in order to avoid confiscation, eight million dollars cash. I believe the Church property in the Province of Quebec to-day is much larger than that of France during the Revolution. And this wealth was given for what? For things which were calculated more than anything else to demoralize the people and make them miserable and unhappy. And to whom was it given? To an Italian bishop who called himself Representative of Christ, with the same right with which I could do it, and who, in the glorious times of Popery, claimed to be "Lord of the Earth," of which He whom the Popes claimed to represent did not possess enough to lay His weary head upon.

B. M.